

2011-2012 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 3
October 31, 2011

Science report:

1. Penguins: Most of the Adélie penguin nests now have 2 eggs, but due to the adverse weather conditions this week, the nest census has postponed. At the first break in the weather, all colonies will be counted, both here & at Point Thomas.

Most of the gentoo penguin nests now have 2 eggs, as well, and a census of occupied nests will be done as soon as the weather cooperates.

Due to a big snowstorm on Monday (10/31) & Tuesday (11/1), many nests in the big Adélie penguin colonies were drifted over & several were lost. However, those birds that stayed on their nests, some even getting completely covered over with snow, did fine & still have their eggs. All nests are now snow-free, due to the big melt-off this week.

2. Skuas: Regular checks of Copa skuas continued & many of the territories are now with at least one bird in attendance, including a few south polar skuas, which generally return a bit later. All of the brown skuas that hold penguin territories have been regularly seen & are actively taking eggs from the colonies. Territories where an old mate has yet to return have several new birds displaying with the returning old territorial holders. Occasionally, a new skua will challenge the resident territory holder in an attempt to take over that territory, often resulting in vicious fights, sometimes to the death. We have observed a few confrontations this year so far, but nothing major, and there have been no changes in territory ownership to date.

Camp activities:

We had a nice, quiet Halloween on Monday evening, with just the 4 of us, complete with some very imaginative costumes, a jack-o-lantern, and a dinner of predominantly orange food.

On Thursday (11/3), a barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) appeared at the hut & decided to roost for the night in our boot room (the door had been left open to cool down the freshies room). It was still alive the next morning, but due to the bad weather, we decided to let it stay inside until the weather improved. The weather never improved that day, and, unfortunately, the poor little thing expired that evening, most likely from starvation, as there are no flying insects here for it to eat. This is the first incidence of a barn swallow at Copa, and the first song bird, in fact. It will be interesting to find out if there have been other reported sightings of barn swallows in Antarctica.



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The “Polar Pioneer” arrived on Saturday morning (11/5), the ship the Poles use for resupply & transport of personnel. After only 2-3 hours of offload activities, they had to stop, due to the winds, and have not been able to continue since.

Weekly Weather:

The week started with a big snowstorm from the east, lasting over 24 hours, from Monday morning (10/31) to Tuesday morning (11/1), and leaving big drifts & much of the area covered in deep snow. It was a cold storm, with temperatures below freezing, but the rest of the week was mostly above freezing, with 2 days above 40. This week has also been very windy, blowing over 20 knots every day. Four of those days exceeded 50 knots, and 2 of them went over 60, curtailing all outdoor activities. Saturday (11/5), there was rain mixed with the wind & warm temperatures, resulting in most of the snow melting, creating rivers of melt-water everywhere. By Sunday (11/6), much of the snow was gone & the torrents had diminished.

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